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THE ALDINE:

THE ART JOURNAL OF AMERICA.

CONDUCTED BY JAMES SUTTON.

NEW YORK, JANUARY, 1876.

THE CENTENNIAL NEW YEAR.

IT arises out of the future,
  Which holds the oncoming years,
In the guise of a beautiful woman
  Still beset by her maiden fears,
And yet with an eye of vigor
  And a force in her winsome smile,
That bespeak her the true Minerva
  And the fate of our land erewhile.

'Tis an hundred years since the fathers,
  Invoking Heaven's mighty aid,
Wide proclaimed their contempt for tyrants,
  And their flag to the world displayed;
And never since broad on Eden
  Broke the sunrise dawn of gold,
Such an hundred years of progress
  O'er the gray old earth have rolled.

All the world has been moving onward
  With a hurried and eager pace;
And we, of the Western Empire —
  Have we lagged at all in the race?
Not so, if a thousand records,
  Alike written and spoken well,
May be trusted, to coming ages
  The whole truth of our youth to tell.

Not faultless — oh no, not faultless;
  For when, through the hot young veins
Has the blood flowed on so calmly
  As that fettered by age's chains?
Not faultless — no; but all willing
  From discovered error to turn,
And the wisdom of true experience
  In the sternest of schools to learn.

With a name and a place among nations;
  With an arm that can roundly smite;
But with better and wiser dependence
  On the weapons of truth and right;
With a rank in the World of Letters
  At which older nations may start;
With pre-eminent place in Invention
  And no meaner holding in Art.

So comes the Centennial New Year,
  With a gathering from regions wide,
At once to be taught and to teach us
  What in truth is a nation's pride;
And well shall it be, if, low humbled,
  We sit at Instruction's feet,
Yet still hold the content of true manhood
  Where no peer of our own we meet.

To the mem'ry of those who have left us
  Fill the New-Year cup to-day, —
And then to the glorious living
  Who must cheer and guide our way,
And to her who sits resplendent
  In the clouds of our future, the while,
And who blends the calm mien of the goddess
  With an earth-born woman's smile!

-- *Henry Morford.*

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A DIP INTO PRINTERS' INK.

IN many other things has speculation found a legitimate field for those considerations, half droll or altogether earnest, with reference to the past history of inventions and discoveries, besides that celebrated research into the personality and proceedings of the man who first ate an oyster. For, as is very well understood, there are a thousand things, either intrinsically trifling in themselves, or so insignificant beside other details with which they may be employed, as to seem literally of no consequence,— while in point of fact they supply a large part of the foundation of the whole, and without them the great result would be as far from possibility as in the event of the absence of what seems at the first glance infinitely greater. Without doubt, to all minds except those absolutely employed in some branch of the typographical art, such is the case with printers' ink, as compared with the great machinery and the skillful processes through which the wondrous modern results are achieved — at the same time that scarcely anything connected with the art is of more intrinsic consequence than that dark and sticky composition forming the connection between the types, the paper and the eye, and into which we propose to take a brief "dip," without extending it to a plunge.

Many details with reference to the invention of the presses employed in printing, from the diminutive specimens of Faust and Guttenberg, about the size of a modern copying-press, and with something like the simple mechanism of a modern cider-press, to the massive cylinders, accurate as mathematical problems, and manageable as if instinct with life, on which THE ALDINE is rolled off for distribution to an admiring clientelle, or the more rapid and careless ones on which the great dailies are whirled forth at speed for the commercial eye — many of these details have been preserved and handed down, as of something appealing strongly at once to the senses and the intelligence. And so, in a somewhat less degree, of the types, which began as clumsy wooden blocks, and have become delicate and clear-cut bits of metal, almost ornamental in shape, as quite so in the brightness of their first estate. But what corresponding care of record has been bestowed on the preparation of printing-ink, which has seemed to the average mind quite secondary to all the machinery by and with which it was employed? What cyclopedia lovingly gathers the history and the anecdotes of its manufacture, or traces the steps by which it has become one of the most perfect and costly compounds in existence? In point of fact, who, except those interested in its manufacture, or a few of the more philosophical of those winning livelihoods from its use, pay it any special regard, or consider it anything more than so much "some kind of coloring matter, and some kind of oil" — (which latter may be vinegar, for all that they really know to the contrary) — used to daub upon types and be thence transferred to the paper in waiting for it? Very few, we suspect — the deduction being drawn alike from the paucity of information contained in books which might be expected to treat at length of the history of this manufacture, and the very moderate amount of intelligence on the theme, discovered in an extended line of conversations directed to it. And yet, as before hinted, how utterly impossible would it be to produce an ALDINE of to-day, or any one of the other art publications following creditably in its wake, had not persistent effort in the direction of improving this material been supplemented by an amount of patient care scarcely necessary in any other walk of manufacture!

It is obvious that the early masters of printing — the carven blocks at first, and then the movable types, accomplished facts — must have experienced some anxiety, and suffered corresponding inconvenience, in finding the medium for transference in making the desired impressions. Equally obvious must it be, even without the aid of the early copies to form the conclusion, that the first printing-inks would have been black, the color furthest from the proximate white of the paper being the one most capable of revealing itself against it to advantage. It needs scarcely more of thought to decide that charcoal, the most common of black substances capable of easy pulverization, and always extensively used for various mechanical and domestic purposes in those southern countries of Europe where printing had its first practical application, would have been the first employed to supply the black base of the mixture,— and that oil of some character, as the liquid with which the color would most readily mix and not liable to quick drying away, would have been the first agent of dilution. Such was the fact, indeed, with both the materials, as we have some data for deciding,— the charcoal varied with mineral blacks, however, and the oil in the early instances that most easily attainable in the same sections — the expressed product of the olive. It was later experience, demonstrating that olive-oil lacked the requisite body for heavy blacks, and, from its thinness, showed a willful propensity to spread into the paper beyond the letters — which led to the subsequent adoption of oils extracted from nuts, or crushed from seeds, the flax-seed oil, or "linseed" of commerce, eventually taking the place of all others in the manufacture.

Whatever the nature of the experiments made (and, truth to say, most of them are involved in considerable mystery), certain it is that a very notable progress was achieved quite early in the use of printing, in perfecting the inks necessary for employment on the heavy and often rough paper of the time. Many of the specimens now extant show great fineness of edge in the impressions, with very little running of the oil into the surrounding paper, and a full body of black in the letters — evidencing that the material must have been well chosen and carefully prepared. That it should have shown the latter quality, is only natural, the labor of preparation being considered. All the inks of that day, as is well known, were prepared by grinding on flat stones, after the manner then and now necessary for the fine colors of the painter; and the slow and toilsome character of such a process need not be more than indicated, as a whole nation of preparers, working in that mode, could scarcely have supplied enough of ink, daily, for the consumption of a single great morning paper of the present day. There seems to have been plenty of time for the preparation, however, when the corresponding slowness of use is considered — the only mode of applying it to the types being found, then, as for centuries after, in the sopping of soft leathern balls with the ink, on the stone, and transferring the ink to the types by repeated tappings. Necessarily, the process of printing, with the slow and defective presses of the time, and with the need of such extreme care in manipulation, was also of the most tedious character; and some idea of the contrast of that time with the present, in this regard, may be given in saying that probably all the work of all the printing-presses of the first hundred years after the discovery of printing proper, would not have sufficed to put forth three monthly editions of THE ALDINE, if indeed it would have reached nearly so far in capacity.

It is pertinent, in this place, to say that the especial tutelary saint of this publication, Aldus Manutius, in the perfecting of those works which have since excited the admiration of all ages, and which have induced the adoption of his name as a guarantee of excellence, took no secondary part in efforts for the improvement of the ink which was to supply him so important an agent. Tradition alleges, with great show of truth, that this master spent much time and made many experiments in perfecting his inks, and that for some of the more important processes since combining to produce the (apparent) perfection now arrived at, the world of artistic printing is largely indebted to him. Certain it is, that in the books from his celebrated press, yet preserved, some of the most satisfactory details are found in the wonderful retention of color, and in the sharp-edged impressions, fine grained, and without any perceptible spreading, evidencing all the best qualities then attainable in the liquid medium.

Carefully avoiding any attempt to name all the ingredients employed, throughout the late centuries, or to enumerate the processes involved — it may yet be proper to say that during a long period, and in various countries, for the manufacture of the finer inks, ivory-black (*i. e.*, black made from the burning and calcining of ivory) was in extensive use,— and that at a comparatively early day it was found necessary to boil the oil, and to add resins, by way of thickening it, and eventually to set it on fire and (technically) burn it, to produce the greatest possible amount of strength with almost total elimination of the greasier qualities. During a certain period, too, onions and crusts of bread were thrown into the kettle in which the oil was being boiled, in order to additionally destroy the grease, and thus prevent the spreading of the ink into the paper, when practically used. For the manufacture of colored inks, much affected in religious works, necessarily, with the oil, or, technically, "the varnish," similarly prepared, the various colors, as employed in painting, were brought into use in giving the requisite tint to the ink; but, although fine printing in colors has never been a more